

Readings: *Ephesians 3: 8 – 12; Ps. 88 (89): 1 – 4, 21, 22, 25, 27; John 10: 11 – 66.*

Ambrose was born in Trier about AD 340, the son of the Prefect of Gaul. He studied law and practised as a lawyer, and was appointed governor of much of Northern Italy, with his residence in Milan, the capital of the Western Empire.

In 374 fighting broke out between differing Christian parties over the election of a new bishop of Milan. Ambrose – a declared Christian, but not yet baptized – made a speech urging the people to act in peace. While he was speaking a child's voice was heard saying "Ambrose for Bishop!" The crowd took up the cry, and proclaimed him bishop of Milan. The election was confirmed by the bishops of the province: within a week Ambrose was baptized and on 7th December he was consecrated as bishop.

His way of life changed at once. He gave his money to the poor and his lands to the Church, retaining only enough to support his sister. He turned his studies from the law to the scriptures and fathers of the Church, and became an effective writer and preacher. He lived a simple life, working hard in the service of his people, any one of whom could come to speak with him. He celebrated the mass every day and, with Saint Hilary of Poitiers (13th January), was responsible for the introduction of hymns into the liturgy in the Western Church.

One of the most influential events of his life was his meeting with Augustine (later bishop of Hippo: 28th August), who had gone to Milan to study philosophy. Ambrose led him to the Christian faith and presided at his baptism at Easter in AD 386.

As bishop of the imperial capital, Ambrose found himself involved in political affairs. In 384 he led opposition to the restoration of sacrifices to the goddess of Victory in the Roman Senate House.

He was not afraid to confront the emperor Theodosius, who had allowed the massacre of seven thousand men, women and children as an act of reprisal. In 393 Ambrose urged him to public penance, and refused to receive him at the altar until it was performed. The emperor submitted.

Ambrose died on Good Friday, 4th April, 397 (which explains the choice of the anniversary of his consecration to be his feast day). In 845 his relics were moved to the basilica in Milan dedicated in his honour, where they can still be venerated.